**Explore the Intel Visual Ranking Tool. Click on the Overview and Benefits link. How does the tool facilitate students’ critical thinking?  Consider the type of reasoning students demonstrate as they do Visual Ranking and how their activity involves both the cognitive and affective domains.**

The visual ranking tool facilitates students’ growth across a broad spectrum of both the cognitive and affective domains. One the cognitive side, knowledge might be tested by the reordering of a timeline, comprehension by ranking based on a calculation, analysis directly by the process of ranking, synthesis by comparing individual rankings to those of another group, and evaluation by forcing students to defend their positions. On the affective side the visual ranking tool is most useful for the higher levels. It develops the concept of values by requiring students to assign relative values to different items on their list, organization by resolving conflicts between the items, and internalization by adjusting their opinions based upon the feedback provided.

Additionally, critical thinking is encouraged throughout this activity by allowing students to debate (alone or as a group) the relative merits of the different items on a list.  This process involves the creation of personalized criteria (by which the items are to be judged), the grading of each item based upon this criteria, and, finally, a thoughtful reordering of the list.   Students are forced to consider each item in depth, while at the same time remembering the collective goal(s) of the activity. Finally, students are provided further feedback through the option of comparing their group’s rankings with the rest of the class. This important final step allows some personal reflection, and encourages an objective review of decisions previously made.

**Next click on the Tutorial (underneath Demo on the Try the Tool page) and view the animation. What are the key steps a teacher must take to set up the Visual Ranking Tool and engage students in using the tool? Read the directions on pages 1-5 of the tutorial.**

How to set up a Visual Ranking Tool for Students: (1) Create a project in the teacher workspace.  This involves naming the project, providing a brief description of the task, and prompting the students to rank ALL of the items listed. (2) Engage the students by involving them in the list-making process, keeping in mind not to have so many items that the prospect of ranking them becomes overwhelming.  (3) First create, and then provide to the students usernames and passwords so that they may access the tool. (4) After the different groups have submitted their rankings, encourage further debate by comparing one group’s results to another, or to the class average.

**Click on the Project Examples link and explore the Project Ideas and Unit Plans. How do the examples stimulate your thinking of how to use the Visual Ranking Tool? Consider the grade level and subject area you plan to teach and how you could modify one of the projects or create your own from scratch. What curriculum goals would your Visual Ranking project address?**

At first I did not quite understand the depth of thinking involved in ranking a list.  It seemed a little superficial to, for example, decide once and for all what is the most important job skill to have in the 21st century.  However, the more I looked at the project ideas and unit plans, the more I began to fully grasp that the real value of the exercise is in the debate, and not really in the final result.  Regardless of whether or not a student’s ranking is correct (which would often be an arbitrary decision), the fine distinctions he or she has explored through debate develop a very thorough understanding of the many issues at play. I think this activity is well suited for any lesson which explores the causes of a complex event. In my own field, high school English, I can think of a number of ways this tool might be incorporated. If my class was reading Huck Finn, it would be very productive to have them rank the many reasons why Huck puts himself at risk by accompanying Jim on the raft. Not that anyone is able to completely answer that question, but discussing both the distinctions and the overlap between Huck’s motivations would leave everyone involved with a better understanding of the novel as a whole.